



## **Accompanying the Called**

*An Introductory Guide for Parishioners, Mentors, and Trusted Companions*

### **Introduction: Standing on Holy Ground**

At some point, many people find themselves entrusted with another person's discernment.

- A young person asks a question.
- A student wonders aloud about their future.
- A friend shares a quiet stirring in prayer.

You may not feel prepared for that moment, but you are standing on holy ground.

The Church does not reserve discernment conversations only for priests or vocation directors. God often uses parishioners, mentors, teachers, and trusted companions to encourage openness, name gifts, and help create space for listening.

This guide is written for lay people who want to walk well with someone discerning priesthood or consecrated life, without trying to guide or decide the path for them.

### **Your Role as a Parishioner or Mentor**

As a parishioner or mentor, your role is not to discern for someone, but to walk with them.

You are not expected to:

- Evaluate their readiness
- Determine God's will
- Provide spiritual direction

You are invited to:

- Listen with patience
- Affirm the gifts you see
- Encourage prayer and trust in God
- Gently point toward appropriate spiritual support when needed

Discernment unfolds over time. Your presence helps make that process less isolating and more rooted in faith.



## **What Encouragement Often Looks Like**

Encouragement is usually quieter than advice.

It may look like:

- Asking thoughtful, open-ended questions
- Giving someone permission to take their time
- Affirming peace, joy, or generosity you notice
- Reassuring them that uncertainty is normal

Sometimes the most faithful response is simply: “I’m glad you shared this with me. I’ll be praying for you.”

## **What to Be Careful Of**

Even with the best intentions, some responses can unintentionally close doors.

Try to avoid:

- Pressuring someone to decide
- Comparing their journey to someone else’s
- Speaking as if God’s will is already obvious
- Treating discernment as something to “figure out” quickly

Discernment is not about rushing toward an answer. It is about learning to listen.

## **Walking With Someone at Different Stages of Life**

Discernment does not look the same at every stage of life. Questions, fears, and hopes shift over time, and so does the way accompaniment is received. What remains constant is the need for patience, prayer, and trust in the Holy Spirit.

### **Adolescence (High School Years)**

For many young people, discernment begins simply as a question: “What might God be inviting me to do with my life?”

At this stage, it is less about making decisions and more about becoming open.

#### **How you can be helpful:**

- Encourage a growing relationship with Christ through prayer and the sacraments
- Affirm gifts you notice, especially generosity, leadership, or a love for the Church
- Normalize curiosity about priesthood and consecrated life without expectation



Young people often need reassurance that they do not need answers right away. Your calm presence can help keep discernment from feeling overwhelming or intimidating.

**When to encourage the next step:**

If a young person expresses sustained interest or asks deeper questions, you might gently suggest speaking with a trusted priest, youth minister, or vocation director, always framing it as an invitation rather than a requirement.

**Young Adulthood (College and Early 20s)**

This stage is often marked by deeper reflection, growing independence, and pressure to make long-term decisions. Discernment may feel more urgent, but also more confusing.

**How you can be helpful:**

- Offer space for honest conversation without rushing conclusions
- Encourage prayer that listens for God’s guidance rather than seeks immediate clarity
- Affirm that discernment is about freedom, not restriction

Many young adults fear that openness to priesthood or consecrated life means closing off other possibilities. You can gently remind them that God’s invitations always lead toward deeper joy and freedom, not fear.

**When to encourage the next step:**

This is often an appropriate time to suggest spiritual direction, vocation retreats, or “Come and See” experiences, especially if the person desires more clarity or structure in their discernment.

**Adulthood (Mid-20s to 40s)**

At this stage, people may already have careers, relationships, or long-held plans. Discernment of priesthood or consecrated life can feel disruptive or even unrealistic.

**How you can be helpful:**

- Acknowledge the courage it takes to revisit life direction
- Help them see how past experiences may be part of God’s preparation
- Resist language that frames discernment as “starting over”



God often works through what has already been lived. Encouragement at this stage helps someone trust that discernment is not a rejection of their past, but a deeper integration of it.

**When to encourage the next step:**

If discernment feels persistent or deeply rooted, encouraging a conversation with a vocation director or spiritual director can help them discern responsibly and within the life of the Church.

**Later Adulthood (40+)**

Discernment later in life often carries a different tone, shaped by wisdom, experience, and prayer. Questions may center more on meaning, fruitfulness, and service.

**How you can be helpful:**

- Affirm that God’s invitations are not limited by age
- Encourage trust in God’s timing rather than comparison to others
- Support discernment that values prayer, freedom, and peace

Discernment at this stage is often quieter and more contemplative. Your role is to affirm openness and trust, not to assess feasibility.

**When to encourage the next step:**

When appropriate, gently suggest connecting with a vocation director who can speak to pathways that respect both the individual’s life experience and the Church’s discernment process.

**Understanding Priesthood and Consecrated Life**

While parishioners are not meant to teach or explain every detail of priesthood and consecrated life, having a basic understanding can help conversations feel grounded and confident.

**Priesthood**

Priesthood is a vocation of service to the Church, rooted in sacramental ministry, preaching, and pastoral care. Discernment of the priesthood involves prayer, formation, and accompaniment within the diocesan or religious context of the Church.

For someone discerning the priesthood, encouragement often means helping them remain open, prayerful, and connected to the Church, not evaluating their readiness.



## **Consecrated Life**

Consecrated life is a way of following Christ more closely through a life dedicated to prayer, community, and service. It takes several forms within the Church, including:

- Religious life
- Consecrated virginity
- Secular institutes
- Societies of apostolic life
- Eremitic life

Each form expresses a different way of giving one's life entirely to God. Discernment involves discovering not only if someone is called, but how that call might be lived.

## **Encouraging Healthy Next Steps**

One of the most important roles a parishioner or mentor can play is helping discernment remain connected to the wider Church.

You can encourage next steps by:

- Suggesting conversations with a vocation director
- Encouraging spiritual direction
- Recommending retreats or discernment opportunities

These invitations should always be gentle and respectful, offered as support rather than pressure.

A simple phrase such as, "Have you thought about talking with someone who helps people discern priesthood or consecrated life?" can open the door without pushing it open.

## **Trusting the Holy Spirit**

When walking with someone discerning priesthood or consecrated life, it is natural to wonder whether you are saying or doing the "right" thing. It is important to remember that discernment does not rest on your words or actions alone.

The Holy Spirit is already at work.

Long before a conversation begins, God has been stirring hearts, inviting openness, and drawing people closer to Himself. Your role is not to create clarity, but to trust that God is faithful in guiding those who seek Him.

Discernment often unfolds slowly. It includes moments of peace and moments of uncertainty. Both can be part of how God leads. Remaining patient, prayerful, and attentive allows space for that work to continue without pressure.



Walking with someone in discernment is an act of trust. Trust that God knows their heart. Trust that He will guide them in His time. Trust that simply being present is already fruitful.

### **A Prayer for Those Who Accompany Discernment**

Heavenly Father,  
You call each of us to follow You in love and freedom.  
We place before You those who are discerning the priesthood  
and consecrated life, and those who walk alongside them.

Grant us listening hearts, patient spirits, and the grace to encourage without directing.  
Help us to trust Your guidance, to speak with charity and humility,  
and to remain faithful companions on the journey.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Mother,  
may all who seek Your will grow in peace, courage,  
and openness to Your holy invitation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.